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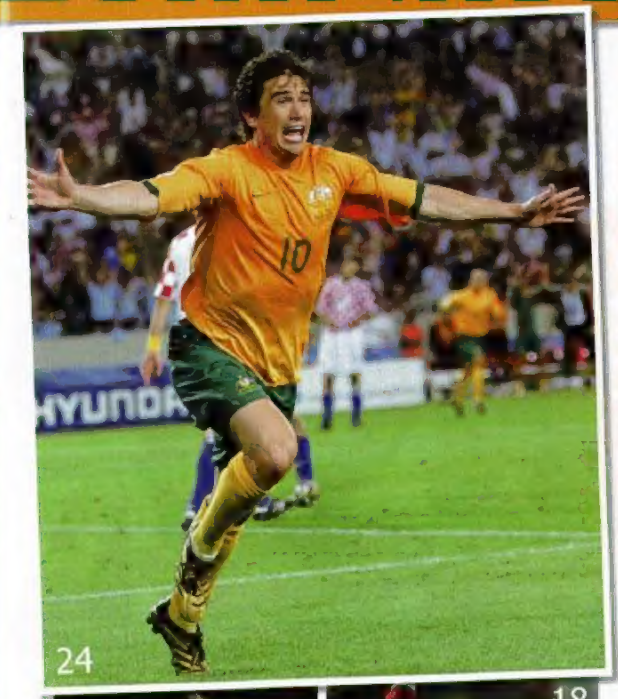

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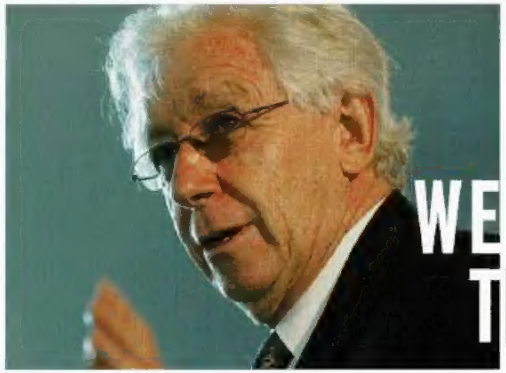

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN

"The AFC format also gives fans a feast of football to enjoy and more opportunity than ever to support the Qantas Socceroos"

The Qantas Socceroos begin the qualifying campaign for the 2010 FIFA World Cup tonight against Qatar, whom I am delighted to welcome to Australia.

I am particularly pleased to acknowledge also the President of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), Mohamed Bin Hammam and the President of the Qatar Football Federation, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani.

There have been many firsts for football in Australia in recent years, but none quite as significant and as important for the long-term benefit of the game than the challenging journey to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

Just as Australia's future is closely linked with Asia, so too is the future of Australian football, and it is a landmark occasion to be participating in our first FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign as part of the AFC.

From a football perspective, being part of the AFC gives our nine national teams high quality opposition every time they take the field, as well as the potential for an extended qualification campaign.

High quality opposition benefits the entire football family in Australia. It helps us to improve our own standards, quality of play, coaching and facilities; and, as the quality of our national teams improves, the impact will be felt down the line to the grass roots players which, turning full circle, gives us a larger pool of potential players for the national teams.

The AFC format also gives Australian fans a feast of football to enjoy and more opportunity than ever before to show support for the Qantas Socceroos. In this round three group alone - which also includes China and Iraq - the Qantas Socceroos will play six games, including crucial games at home on three occasions, including tonight's match.

But membership of the AFC has a much broader dimension also. It is an important way for Australia's engagement with Asia to become more than an economic bargain or a trade deal, but a meeting of hearts and minds.

It gives us, as a nation, a capacity and opportunity to learn more about the region and the people in which we live through a common interest and passion in our favourite sport.

This is not a question of repudiating our history in favour of geography because, as we shape the future in the earlier part of the 21st century, the two will increasingly intersect.

Thank you to all our partners for their support for tonight's game - and a big thank you to all the fans for your passionate and colourful support of our national team.

My best wishes to Pim Verbeek and the Qantas Socceroos, as well as Jorge Fossati and the Qatari team, for what I am sure will be a competitive and enjoyable match for all.

Frank Lowy AC
Chairman
Football Federation Australia

JOHN BRUMBY

OUR JOURNEY TO SOUTH AFRICA BEGINS

"FOOTBALL IS THRIVING IN VICTORIA AT ALL LEVELS - FROM THE GRASS ROOTS TO MELBOURNE VICTORY AND THEIR UPCOMING AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE MATCHES"

It is a great pleasure to welcome football players, officials and spectators to Melbourne for this historic match between Australia and Qatar.

Tonight marks the start of Australia's highly anticipated qualifying campaign for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

It is the Qantas Socceroos' first FIFA World Cup match since their membership in the Asian Football Confederation - and the first game under the leadership of new head coach Pim Verbeek.

Melbourne is proud to be one of the world's great sporting cities.

That is why our Government is building a state-of-the-art new stadium to provide a permanent home for football in Victoria. It is also why we worked with Football Federation Australia to bring a package of world class Qantas Socceroos matches to Melbourne.

The first two matches attracted unprecedented support - with more than 95,000 fans at the Qantas Socceroos' friendly against Greece in 2006 and more than 70,000 fans at the match against Argentina last year.

Football is thriving in Victoria at all levels - from grass roots, to Melbourne Victory's upcoming participation in the AFC Champions League, to the thrilling FIFA World Cup qualifier we will see tonight.

On behalf of the people of Victoria, congratulations to everyone involved in the Australia versus Qatar match.

I look forward to a memorable contest.

John Brumby MP
Premier of Victoria

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ARCHIE THOMPSON'S WORLD RECORD GOAL HAUL

Archie Thompson will never forget this day. Neither will those who saw it. In a 31-0, yes that's right, a 31-0 victory for the Qantas Socceroos over a plucky American Samoa, the hot shot striker got himself on the scoresheet 13 times during this remarkable FIFA World Cup qualifier in Coffs Harbour. Who said 13 was an unlucky number?

GOLDEN MOMENT

25.05.06

MELBOURNE LAD JOSIP SKOKO'S WONDER STRIKE DEFEATS THE REIGNING EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS GREECE IN HIS HOMETOWN

For any Qantas Socceroo, scoring the winning goal in the Green and Gold is a highlight. But if that player is from Melbourne and that game is at the MCG, then such a memory is just that much sweeter – especially when the opposition is reigning European Champions Greece, and 95,000 screaming fans witness it at the famous arena. Welcome to Josip Skoko's golden moment from 2006.

Otto Rehagel's Greece were the reigning 2004 Euro champions when they visited Australia for this friendly. And with the Qantas Socceroos gearing up for their first FIFA World Cup since 1974, this spiked interest to a fever pitch for the Aussies final hit-out on home soil against the Greeks.

The Qantas Socceroos' 1-0 victory showed the FIFA World Cup-bound Aussies were not to be underestimated on the international stage. And it was Skoko who also proved himself with a spectacular winner that rocketed off his left boot.

After a quarter of an hour, the Qantas Socceroos won a corner on the left. With a training ground set play in mind, Mark Bresciano's deep, looping corner almost reached the other side of the penalty box as Lucas Neill met it and headed back into the mix.

An Aussie player got to the ball first and headed it away from goal to the edge of the Greek box. Waiting was Skoko. The ball bounced and sat up perfectly for the former Geelong lad whose left foot volley moved in the air and deceived the helpless keeper Antonios Nikopolidis. It flew into the top left hand corner.

The crowd was on its feet and the Aussies were away. The Qantas Socceroos dominated the rest of the game and were worthy winners – a victory all the more meritorious given that both Harry Kewell and Tim Cahill were missing due to injury.

For Skoko, however, it was to be a particularly sweet moment. Scoring at the "G" in front of proud friends and family in an Aussie shirt was something to savour. The midfielder had just completed his first season with English Premier League side Wigan Athletic, so 2006 was panning out beautifully.

However, Skoko sat on the bench in Germany and did not see any game time for the Qantas Socceroos. But his disappointment at the time was tempered by the fact he'd scored a famous winner against the European champions in his home city just weeks earlier.

The English-based Premiership midfielder retired from the national team in 2007, saying goodbye to his hometown fans against Argentina at the MCG last September. But it's Skoko's May rocket that still resonates with the Melbourne fans.

TELSTRA FOOTBALL ANYTIME

Telstra Football Anytime (TFA) is the official club based introductory programme of Football Federation Australia and is proudly supported by Telstra and the Australian Sports Commission.

Simply by conducting the TFA programme your club will receive free football equipment as well as providing a great football experience for children and their parents. The more participants involved in the programme, the more bibs, markers and balls your club will receive.

TFA is a six session programme with each session lasting 75 minutes. TFA will now be offered in two formats of which a club can choose to conduct either format depending upon their individual needs.

These programs can be conducted over a six week period or condensed into a school holiday program in the pre-season or any time during the year. One of the real features of TFA is its flexibility in terms of when it can be delivered.

The programme costs $66 (inc.GST) per child; this includes the six sessions with children also receiving their very own equipment back pack which contains a Nike football, shin pads, markers, drink bottle and squeezy mini football.

For each programme, the registration closing date is 10 working days before the start of the programme. The amount of equipment your club will be sent to conduct the programme and to retain is based on the number of children registered at this time.

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HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE FINALS RESUME

The entertainment for Aussie fans won't cease at the final whistle of tonight's FIFA World Cup qualifier. Tonight, attention has switched from the thrilling Hyundai A-League finals series to the Socceroos' match, but the games recommence this weekend with two huge second legs.

The Central Coast Mariners host local rivals Newcastle Jets in the Major Semi-Final while in Queensland, Roar entertains Sydney FC in the Minor Semi-Final.

Central Coast Mariners were crowned the Hyundai A-League 2007/08 Premiers, after finishing the competition ahead of the Jets by a one goal margin on goal difference.

Tickets for the second legs this weekend at Bluetongue Stadium between the Mariners and the Jets, and at Suncorp Stadium between Roar and Sydney FC can be purchased from any Ticketek outlet, www.ticketek.com.au, or phone 132 849.

Hyundai A-League television partner, Fox Sports, will broadcast every Hyundai A-League 2008 Final Series match "Live and Exclusive" – including an extended one-hour pre-match coverage of the Hyundai A-League 2008 Grand Final.

Ticketing information for the Hyundai A-League 2008 Preliminary Final and the Hyundai A-League 2008 Grand Final will be released after the completion of the second legs of the Major & Minor Semi-Finals and will be available from the Hyundai A-League website at www.a-league.com.au.

HOLLAND FOR QANTAS YOUNG SOCCEROOS?

Newcastle Jets' teen sensation James Holland (*above*) is eligible to play for the Qantas Young Socceroos who have qualified for this year's Asian Football Confederation Youth Championship.

Aside from Holland, who was named in Pim Verbeek's preliminary 39-man Qantas Socceroo squad, a number of up-and-coming Hyundai A-League talents are likely to also be included for the Qantas Young Socceroos. These include Queensland Roar utility Mitch Nichols and his team-mate Tahj Minniecon. Melbourne Victory defender Sebastian Ryall, Newcastle Jets' attacking midfielder Jason Hoffman and Mariners keeper Andrew Redmayne were also part of the squad that qualified.

Hosts Saudi Arabia qualify automatically as hosts, and the tournament will be held from November 1-16, 2008.

VALE FRANK LOUGHRAN

Football Federation Australia was saddened to hear of the recent passing of former Qantas Socceroo and Olympian Frank Loughran.

Frank is a member of an elite group, having represented Australia at the 1956 Olympic Games in his hometown of Melbourne, in what was the nation's debut appearance in an Olympic football tournament.

He also has the distinction of scoring the second goal in the 2-0 defeat of Japan in Australia's opening match played at Olympic Park.

The Belfast-born Loughran played a total of eight full international matches scoring two goals, and representing Australia 38 times in all matches with 22 goals. He also added another 20 goals in 25 appearances for Victoria.

He moved to Australia at the age of 23 where he played for the Moreland club. Frank was also an inaugural inductee into the Australian football Hall of Fame in 1999.

Frank Loughran was 77.

DID YOU KNOW?

You can buy Qantas Socceroo supporters gear online? Just log onto www.footballaustralia.com.au and click on the tab "Get Your Gear For The Qantas Socceroos". Also on the site, you can purchase Qantas Socceroo action figures, Qantas Socceroo signed jerseys and Qantas Socceroo trading cards.

TEEN BEN JETS IN AUSTRALIA

Promising 16-year-old midfielder Ben Kantarovski has fulfilled a dream and signed a four-year deal with Hyundai A-League side Newcastle Jets. The Lambton school student is the youngest player ever signed to a Hyundai A-League contract.

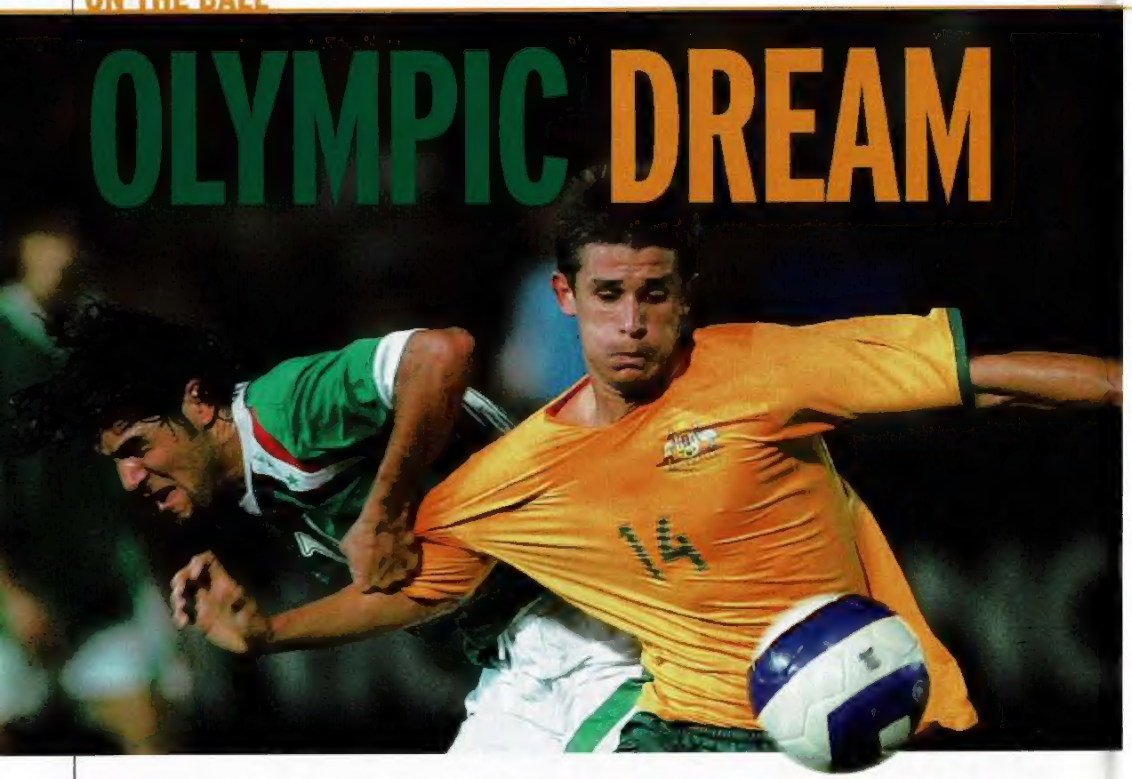
He has been a Jets trainee squad member, is a member of the Qantas Joeys and has played with the NSW Institute of Sport and Newcastle club side Broadmeadow Magic. Ben only turned 16 on January 20.

"He now has the opportunity to hone his craft and needs to establish himself in the squad and push for selection in the fi. His future is very bright," said Jets coach Gary van Egmond.

"It is part of our commitment to provide a pathway for the best young players in Northern New South Wales all the way from their junior club to professionalism."

Ben will continue to study whilst playing for the Newcastle Jets. He was also a member of the Qantas Joeys who qualified for the 2008 AFC U17 Championship later this year.

OLYMPIC DREAM



Graham Arnold's Qantas U23s will appear at the Beijing Olympics later this year buoyed by qualifying through what he says was a very tough phase of qualifiers in the AFC. Here he outlines his plan for the Olympics and tells of his pride in the side

Qantas U23 coach Graham Arnold can't wait to bring his players together as they prepare for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games that begin in August.

Speaking about the team's qualification through the Asian Football Confederation, Arnold said, "Overall the character of the team was outstanding.

"They've been to seven countries in the last year that are not easy to get into or have been played in extreme conditions with its heat and this time in the freezing cold.

"They deserve everything they get by qualifying for the Olympics, but the most important thing for me overall, it gives them now 10 months of international football; it gives them a major tournament to play.

"The players were put into a position in the last two games against Iraq and North Korea where they have never been before; they had to play under pressure and they knew they had to get results.

"It was all new for them and it was wonderful," said Arnold.

Arnold was also keen to pay tribute to his captain Mark Milligan, who scored in the team's final match in North Korea to help the side qualify.

"Milligan is an inspiration; he's a great leader," Arnold praised. "Over the whole tournament, he's been inspirational.

"He has learnt a hell of a lot in the last couple of years; he's now been to a FIFA World Cup, been to an AFC Asian Cup and you've seen him develop and that's why I am so happy we qualified, for the development of these players.

"You've seen the development in Mark, so if the other players are given the opportunity, can you imagine the development of them, if they get the opportunity as well."

So how far can this team go at this year's Olympics? A long way if Arnold has his way.

"Mr Lowy, the Football Federation Australia chairman, told us he would like to get a medal; I would love to get a medal, so therefore we need at least 20 to 25 international friendly games before the Olympics," he added.

"They are match-hardened now after 14 games and if we give them good preparation, I can't see why a medal is not out of reach. They are a wonderfully talented group; thankfully the talented U20 players we have like Nathan Burns, James Troisi, Matt Spiranovic, Dario Vidosic and some others have stepped up and made the squad even stronger.

"I would just like to say and thank all the Hyundai A-League clubs for all their patience and to the coaches - I know I put them in a difficult positions with having to get the players released and play.

"So I am very grateful to them for showing belief in a massive tournament like the Olympics, to help us prepare as best we could."

FOX SPORTS RATINGS BONANZA

Hyundai A-League ratings have increased by 23 percent on Fox Sports this season. Significant growth was driven by strong interest in the final rounds of the season.

Round 21's Sydney FC v Melbourne Victory match ranked as Fox Sports' most watched regular season game in the history of the Hyundai A-League, reaching a total audience of more than 370,000 and an average audience of 136,000.

This year more than 2.8 million viewers have enjoyed Fox Sports' regular season coverage of the Hyundai A-League, with total audiences growing year-on-year.

CEO of Fox Sports' David Malone says, "The success of the A-League on Fox Sports and the closeness of the Premiership is indicative of a very healthy competition.

"We're confident this level interest will continue in the coming weeks and look forward to some more fantastic ratings results throughout the Finals Series".

Fox Sports' live and exclusive coverage of the Hyundai A-League 2008 Finals Series commences this weekend and will culminate in coverage of the Hyundai A-League Grand Final on February 24.

THE FINALS ON TV

FOX SPORTS COVERAGE OF THE HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE 2008 FINALS SERIES CONTINUES...

Fri 8 Feb	SF 2nd Leg - Queensland v Sydney 7.30pm	LIVE	FOX SPORTS 1
Sun 10 Feb	SF 2nd Leg - Central Coast v Newcastle 5.30pm	LIVE	FOX SPORTS 1
Sun 17 Feb	Preliminary Final 5.30pm	LIVE	FOX SPORTS 2
Sun 24 Feb	Grand Final 5.00pm	LIVE	FOX SPORTS 1

SMALL-SIDED GAMES ROLLOUT

In 2008, Football Federation Australia, in conjunction with Member Federations, zones associations and clubs will be rolling out Small-Sided Games (SSG). This rollout commences with the younger age groups, before moving through the ages from 2009.

In 2008 in excess of 60,000 children will be participating in SSG.

Education of clubs, parents and players is vitally important to the success of SSG. With this in mind, the FFA has produced the Small-Sided Games Handbook, the SSG Parent Information Flyer and SSG DVD. Log onto www.footballaustralia.com.au to post information and FAQs regarding SSG.

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BIG YEAR FOR MATILDAS

Planning and preparations are well underway for a huge year with the Matildas competing in the AFC Women's Asian Cup this May in Malaysia.

The team will look to go one step further following their loss to China in penalties during the AFC Asian Cup final on home soil in 2006.

And the Matildas will go into 2008 with Tom Sermanni secured as head coach.

Sermanni also has the job of running the Australian Institute of Sport women's football program for a period that will include the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup and 2012 London Olympic Games.

Since Sermanni took the reins in December 2004, the team has claimed a number of impressive scalps beating world champions Germany, top-ten nation Japan, regional heavyweights China, as well as drawing with perennial superpower USA.

And of course the Matildas stunned the football world with their quarter-final finish at the World Cup last year.

Sermanni is the only Australian with experience of senior coaching in the United States' Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) where he led the San Jose CyberRays and the New York Power.

During his time in the US, Sermanni was named as one of the top three coaches in the WUSA and following the recent FIFA Women's World Cup Sermanni was sought by the United States Soccer Federation for its vacant national team head coach position.

"We are delighted that Tom will remain in Australian football where his vast knowledge and experience will be vital as we look to continue to build the women's game in this country," said Football Federation Australia chief executive officer Ben Buckley.

"Tom has been an integral part of the Matildas success where his passion and understanding of the women's game in Australia is unparalleled.

"Tom will also play an integrated role in development across all aspects of women's football in Australia from grass roots to the elite level working closely with national technical director Rob Baan."

The Matildas go into the year with plenty of plaudits too after an historic quarter final 2007 berth September's FIFA Women's World Cup in China, and with it an all-time highest FIFA world ranking of 12.

Captain Cheryl Salisbury and youngster Ellyse Perry collected major awards at the NSW Institute of Sport Awards late last year.

Salisbury collected the Team Athlete of the Year award, while at the other end of the scale 16-year-old dual international Perry was named Junior Athlete of the Year.

Perry was also a nominee for the Team Athlete of the Year award as was Matildas striker Sarah Walsh. Salisbury was also a finalist in the category of Female Athlete of the Year while Kate Gill was nominated for the Academic Excellence Award.

The Matildas were also nominated as a finalist for the Most Memorable Moment award. What's more, livewire striker Lisa de Vanna became the first footballer to claim the WA Sportswoman of the Year Award, with team-mate Collette McCallum also nominated.

In 2008, expect the Matildas to continue their rise in popularity after last year's spectacular success.

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QATAR

Qatar's star burns bright

With a star-studded local league, Qatar has the means and ambition to emerge as a super power of Asian football

By Aidan Ormond

Qatar's naturalised striker Sebastian Quintana may have had to consult a map before he first arrived in his adopted home, but he and his Qatari team-mates are hoping to put Qatari football on the football map in tonight's vital FIFA World Cup qualifier with Australia.

Australia's opposition tonight should not be underestimated. They came within a whisker of making it to the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France. They beat the likes of China and Iran to enter the last match against Saudi Arabia needing just a point to book the group's automatic qualifying place.

However, with qualification to their first-ever FIFA World Cup tantalisingly close – and a nation gripped by football fever and national pride – they lost out as the Saudis went through 1-0.

Qatar has won major tournaments in Asia. They've taken home an Asian Games gold in men's, won a Gulf Cup and regularly qualify for the region's biggest event, the AFC Asian Cup.

But, Jorge Fossati's ambitious Qatar walk onto Telstra Dome's surface tonight with something even bigger in mind: that elusive FIFA World Cup place.

Journey to the Dome

Thinking big is what they do in Qatar – however it all began small last October. To qualify for this FIFA World Cup group a game last October in the exotic location of Sri Lanka was the mission. They didn't fail.

Qatar squeezed home 1-0 at the Sugathadasa Stadium, Colombo, in the first leg, with the only goal of the game in the 68th minute through Quintana.

In the second leg back in Doha, Qatar thumped the Sri Lankans 5-0 thanks to a brace each from Sayed Ali Bechir and Quintana, and a goal from defender Saad Al-Shammari to send them through.

It was the very least Qatar's fans expected. Now, the challenge really begins for the "Annabi" (Maroons) in this "Group of Death". It features 2007 AFC Asian Cup champions Iraq, FIFA World Cup 2002 participants China and tonight's host Australia – the first time the sides have met at senior level.

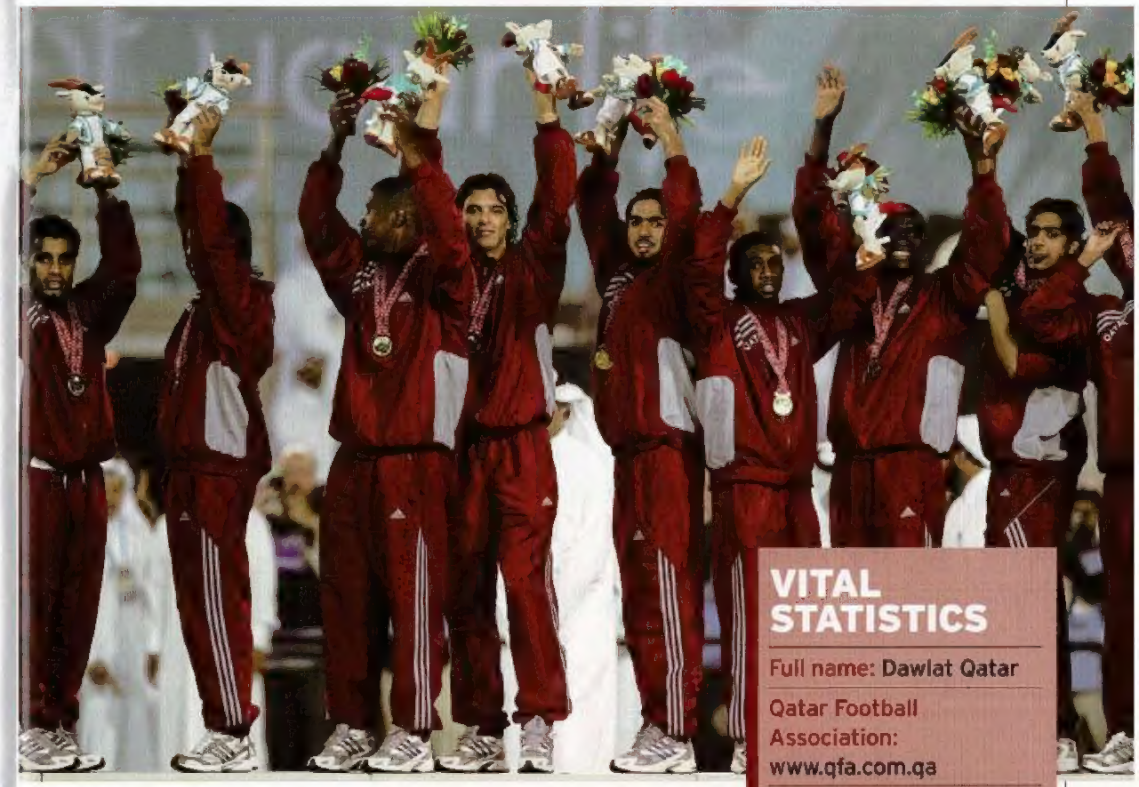
Qatar goes into this FIFA World Cup cycle with the boost of winning a regional trophy. In late 2006, Qatar defeated Iraq 1-0 in the Asian Games final. Bilal Mohammed headed past Iraq's Mohammed Kassid to clinch the gold-medal game for the host nation.

The tournament is a kind of regional Olympic Games and, as far as football is concerned, serves as a platform to develop players for the national team as it's an U23 event. It was the first ever gold medal in football for the Qataris.

This wasn't the only trophy then-coach Bosnian Dzemaludin Musovic had won with Qatar. Musovic, who'd replaced Frenchman Philippe Troussier in 2004, won that year's Gulf Cup held in Qatar.

However, disappointment followed in the two major tournaments that Musovic's Qatar entered last year. In January, UAE hosted the Gulf Cup but Qatar finished winless from three matches in the group stage.

Sadly for Qatar, the 2007 AFC Asian Cup, had a similar sour taste. The team was based in Vietnam for its group B matches. Many felt that Qatar had an outside chance of finishing second behind group powerhouse Japan. However, two draws and a loss consigned the Qataris to bottom place and an early flight home to Doha.



Qatar goes into this FIFA World Cup cycle with the boost of winning a regional trophy – in 2006 Qatar defeated Iraq 1-0 in the Asian Games final

VITAL STATISTICS

- Full name: Dawlat Qatar
- Qatar Football Association: www.qfa.com.qa
- FIFA Ranking: 88
- Average FIFA ranking: 74
- Highest FIFA ranking: 51 (August, 1993)
- Home stadium: Khalifa International Stadium
- Population: 907,000
- Capital: Doha
- Other cities: Musay'id, Dukhan, Umm Bab, Khor, Wakra, Al Khawr
- Major language: Arabic
- Monetary unit: Riyal
- Main exports: Oil, gas

QATAR

At the 2007 AFC Asian Cup Sebastian Quintana proved himself a striker of international quality

It was surprising after a promising start. Quintana, the naturalised Uruguayan, scored a late equaliser to earn an encouraging 1-1 draw with the Blue Samurai at My Dinh National Stadium in Hanoi despite star Qatari midfielder Hussain Yasser seeing red.

But that was followed by a 1-1 draw with host nation Vietnam and a 2-1 loss to UAE, who had Faisal Khalil pop up in the 90th minute to break Qatar hearts.

Qatar finished on two points behind UAE on three and surprise packet Vietnam on four. Japan topped the group going through to the knock-out stage along with the plucky Vietnamese.

SEE YOU IN DOHA

Despite Qatar's relatively small size - it's smaller than the US state of Connecticut - its infrastructure is excellent, helping it win the bid to host the 2011 AFC Asian Cup tournament.

Many of Qatar's stadia were revamped for the 2006 Asian Games, including the 50,000-capacity Khalifa International Stadium. Additionally, futuristic, underground stadiums are being built and there are ambitious plans to host major events such as the Olympics.

On cue

The only joy for Qatar at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup was the fact Quintana proved himself a striker of international quality by scoring all three of the side's goals.

Musovic was delighted with Quintana's form. "During our training camp and during the friendly games Sebastian did not score and a lot of people started to ask questions of him, why he has not been scoring," he said.

"I had to explain to them that it is not just his fault. Sebastian is not just a goalscorer; he is a team player and works hard for the whole team."

This tournament proved to be the last for Musovic, and Jorge Fossati took over the Qatar hot seat in August last year.

Fossati had coached Uruguay against the Qantas Socceroos during that epic FIFA World Cup qualification series in November 2005. And his coaching reputation was further enhanced with a successful stint in the Q-League as he guided powerhouse Al-Sadd to all three domestic titles the previous season.

Al-Sadd finished bottom of its AFC Champions League group in 2007 but that didn't change the QFA's view that the former Uruguayan keeper was the man to lead them to the FIFA World Cup.

Qatar has the vision - and most importantly financial muscle - to give Fossati the best chance to succeed.

Football hotbed

Qatar's reputation as a football hotbed has been fuelled by the boom in the country's natural reserves of gas. It possesses the world's third largest natural gas reserves and its small population has one of the highest per capita incomes of any country.

This petrodollar boom has enabled those with vision to dream big in Doha. Some of the biggest names in world football have landed in the nation's Q-League thanks to a four-foreign player rule and a reported $10 million grant to each of the 10 clubs.

World stars such as Jay-Jay Okocha, Gabriel Batistuta, Marcel Desailly and Romario, and some of Asia's finest, including Iraqi superstar striker Younis Mahmoud and former Qantas Socceroo Tony Popovic, are just some of the names who have been brought in to help the league grow.

And those stellar imports include coaches too. Former Uruguayan supremo Jorge Fossati delivered great success for Q-League powerhouse Al-Sadd before last year being handed the job of steering Qatar's FIFA World Cup campaign for South Africa 2010.

"I met him and his family there and we spoke about those two World Cup qualifiers," says former Qantas Socceroo Tony Popovic, who played for Al-Arabi in the Q-League last season. "He was very nice about it and he did remember me."

This foreign football influence has

QATAR
Men to Watch

SEBASTIAN QUINTANA (STRIKER)

If Qatar are to shock sides in this group, Quintana is likely to be the outlet up front. With three goals in three games during Qatar's disappointing 2007 AFC Asian Cup, he proved his weight in gold.

Months earlier another three in the country's Asian Games triumph in his debut tournament also caught the eye.

Quintana (*below*) - dubbed "The Cat" - scored 14 goals as Al-Gharrafa won the 2005 Qatar League title before moving to Qatar Sports Club at the end of the season where he went on to get his name on the team sheet 19 times.

In a recent interview he explained how he ended up in Qatar. "I was brought to Qatar in September, 2004, by French coach Bruno Metsu who was at Al-Gharrafa. When I received the offer I jumped at the opportunity. But I had to look it up on the map because I didn't know where it was.

"To win the last gold medal at the Asian Games was something really special for us," he said. "It came in the first tournament I played representing Qatar.

"We have a good infrastructure, an ever-growing league and we can do well against the best teams in Asia like Saudi Arabia and Japan. My ultimate dream is to make the FIFA World Cup finals."

Tonight, he'll get his first chance at achieving that goal.

KHALFAN IBRAHIM (STRIKER)

This pint-sized 19-year-old forward (*above*) made a stunning debut for Qatar. Against Bangladesh in a 2007 Asian Cup qualifier he banged in two brilliant goals to announce his arrival.

The hype had been building for some time after a star turn at the 2005 FIFA U17 World Cup against Holland where he scored. And he stunned Asia not long after when he took out the AFC's player of the year award in 2006.

A former Al-Arabi star, Khalfan, is currently with Al-Sadd where he scored 16 goals in 47 appearances to help the side win last season's trophy.

Ibrahim, whose full name is Khalfan Ibrahim Khalfan Al Khalfan, was injured for much of 2007 after tearing a cruciate ligament in his knee but starts 2008 fit and raring to go.

Ibrahim's father also once played for the national team.

ABDULLAH KONI (DEFENDER)

A tall, powerful defender who is originally from Senegal but who took up Qatari citizenship. The Al-Sadd man is a key plank in Fossati's defensive plans as the Qataris look to shut out the likes of John Aloisi and Archie Thompson. The 28-year-old plies his trade for Qatari powerhouse Al-Sadd and is a regular in the national team.

MESAD AL-HAMAD (MIDFIELDER)

One of the young talents coming though, this Al-Sadd midfielder celebrates his 22nd birthday in a few days. He has pace and skill and links well with the forward line. He's hoping he'll celebrate more than just his own special day after tonight's match.

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QATAR

For a relatively small country, Qatar is full of promise and big on vision for its football future

seeped into Qatar's football consciousness. At national team level, this has also been helped by the naturalisation of a number of foreign-born players who have gone on to represent Qatar, including Brazilians Fabio Cesar and Marconi Amaral.

But it's a youth level where the Annabi have excelled in recent years. Regularly starring at AFC level, the youth side reached the final of the 1981 FIFA World Youth Championship against West Germany, which Qatar hosted in Doha. In 1990, the side finished fourth at the FIFA U17 World Championship, beating Australia 1-0, before losing a semi-final to eventual champions Ghana in a penalty shoot-out.

In 2006, Qatari youngster Khalfan Ibrahim made a stunning entry into AFC football history by winning the AFC's Sanyo Asian Player of the Year Award. Judge for yourself tonight if he plays.

What's more, the next generation of Qatari sports stars are being groomed at their high tech sporting academies such as the ASPIRE Academy for Sports Excellence in Doha, which was launched in 2004 with special guest Maradona in attendance.

Needless to say, football is abuzz in this Middle East country, located on the Arabian Peninsula bordering the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia.

For a relatively small country, Qatar is big on vision for its football future – and the team comes to Melbourne tonight full of promise for what they hope will be a landmark FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign.

RICH HISTORY

Football in Qatar dates back to 1948 when oil companies began springing up. With the game gaining in popularity, organised clubs kicked off. Al Najah was the country's first football club in 1950.

Without an organising body, matches were arranged verbally or in writing, and bringing a cup was the responsibility of the team that called for the match in the first place.

By 1951, the first official tournament was played in the city of Dukhan, with the host team edging out the sides from Doha to win the 1951 Izzadeen tournament. Seven years later and under the aegis of the Qatar Oil Company, a new local tournament began called the Pukett Cup. Al Najah were the first winners of this new cup.

Over the next two decades foreign players enriched the local game, until 1974 when the Q-League, kicked off. The Q-League is now a 10-team national league. The top club of the second division is promoted and the bottom club of the first is relegated. At time of writing, Al-Gharaffa was storming home in the first division with an almost unbeatable lead.

"LAPTOP" STADIUM

Did you know they are building an underground stadium in Qatar?

Built on 200,000 square metres, featuring a sunken pitch, it is set to be ready in 2009, in time for the 2011 AFC Asian Cup.

Dr Athanasios Batsilas, the technical director of Qatar Football Association, explains the stadium, which some have said looks like an open laptop:

"You will not see any light towers around this new stadium. This is the unique part of this wonderful project. We shall have lights integrated inside the main stand of the stadium, which can house around 11,000 people. We will have latest audio and video technology inside the stadium. The public shall have an easy access from seven roads leading into the underground car park."

THE ROAD TO

The journey to FIFA World Cup glory starts here

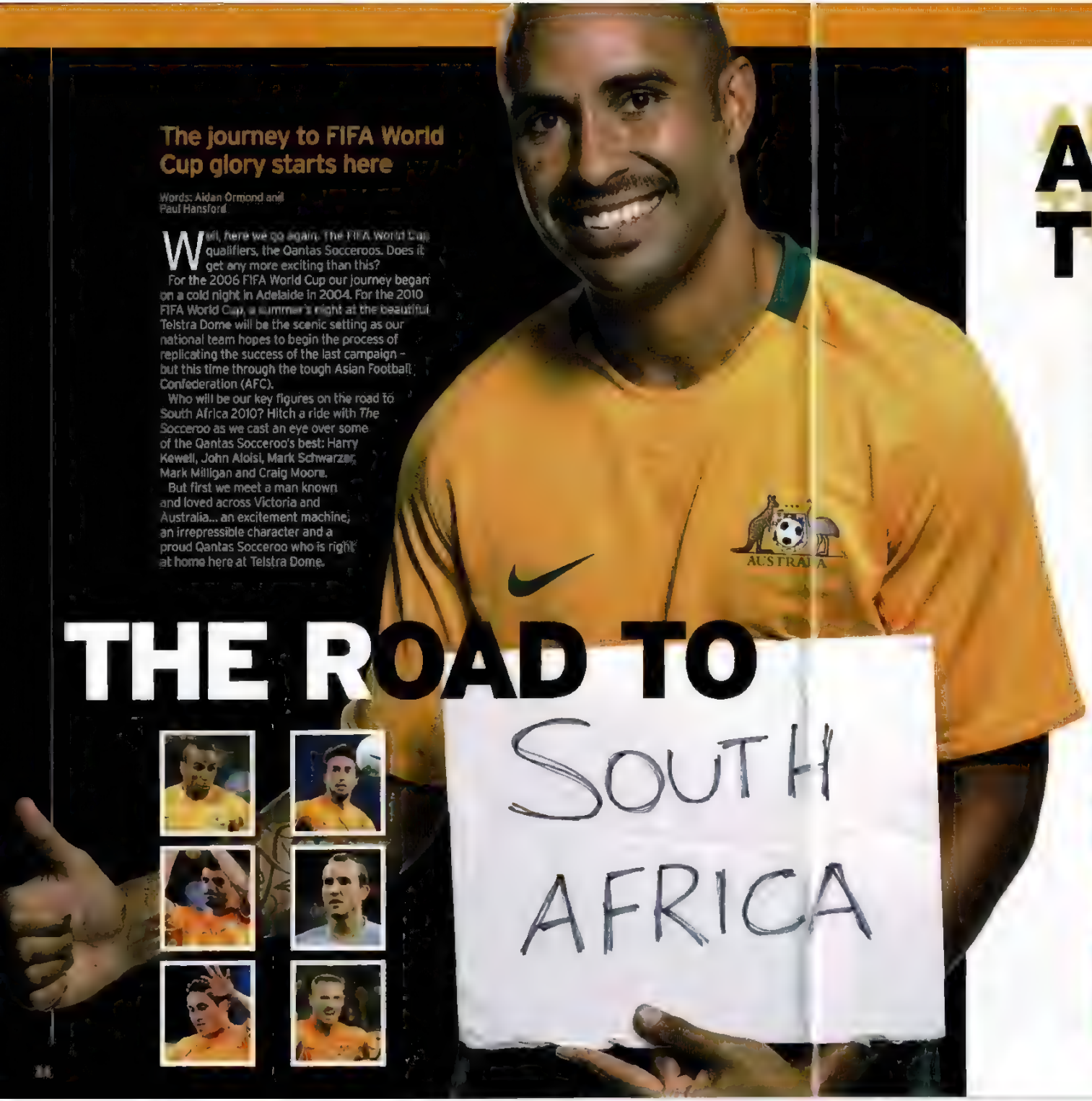
Words: Aidan Ormond and Paul Hansford

Well, here we go again. The FIFA World Cup qualifiers, the Qantas Socceroos. Does it get any more exciting than this?

For the 2006 FIFA World Cup our journey began on a cold night in Adelaide in 2004. For the 2010 FIFA World Cup, a summer's night at the beautiful Telstra Dome will be the scenic setting as our national team hopes to begin the process of replicating the success of the last campaign – but this time through the tough Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

Who will be our key figures on the road to South Africa 2010? Hitch a ride with *The Socceroo* as we cast an eye over some of the Qantas Socceroo's best: Harry Kewell, John Aloisi, Mark Schwarzer, Mark Milligan and Craig Moore.

But first we meet a man known and loved across Victoria and Australia... an excitement machine, an irrepressible character and a proud Qantas Socceroo who is right at home here at Telstra Dome.



ARCHIE THOMPSON

The local lad's back to take on Asia again

You've been through a few qualifying campaigns before. Does it get your juices going as a footballer?
Of course. It's really exciting. To have our route go through Asia now with good quality opponents is fantastic and it's great for the fans to have some meaningful games and a taste of what it's going to be like for us to make it to South Africa. I was a part of the last FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign, now I'm hoping to be a part of this one. To qualify again would be amazing and the start of that is in my home city. It's a meaningful match and it will be great to be part of it.

You'll be playing in the AFC Champions League. Will that help you prepare for the FIFA World Cup qualifiers?
It will be valuable. Just to get a taste of what the conditions are like in the different countries is going to be a help. I think we were all a bit shell-shocked with how the conditions were in the AFC Asian Cup so the more games we can play in those conditions the better. And the conditions are going to be a big factor in how we qualify, not just in the ACL but in the FIFA World Cup.

What are the biggest differences in now having to qualify through Asia?
Qualifying for previous FIFA World Cups, it was really only one game that was important and one game we had to win. No disrespect to any of the other countries in Oceania but they're nowhere near the level of the teams that we will be facing in Asia. It will only prepare us better if we do qualify for the finals. With the better quality that we will face and the amount of preparation that will be done, it will mean we can go even further in the FIFA World Cup.

What can we learn from what happened at the AFC Asian Cup?
We shouldn't take any Asian country for

granted. They surprised us with how they played and we weren't prepared enough to face the challenges. We thought that we were going to cruise through and win this thing straight away. Looking at it now, there was no way in the world that was going to happen and we shouldn't have gone into the AFC Asian Cup with that mindset. Now we know what to expect and we'll be better prepared.

The performance of the Hyundai A-League players was a positive. Do you feel like you're on an even footing with the European-based players now?
We're on a level plane now which is good. In the past it's always been the overseas players that have taken the limelight but I'm hoping the Hyundai A-League players will now have the chance to show their worth. To have Pim Verbeek come to so many games shows the standard is getting better all the time. The Australia manager can't just be reliant on players from overseas. The Hyundai A-League players are going to be very important to us making the FIFA World Cup.

You're obviously looking to impress Pim Verbeek to get into the team...

"I so badly want to be part of the national team – and I don't just mean as a number but as a proper part of the team"

Yeah, I really just want to make the squad. With a new coach it's a clean slate for everyone. I have to keep playing well and score a few more goals if I'm going to be in contention for a place.

Is there a bit of nervousness having a new coach assessing everyone?
Definitely. I so badly want to be part of the national team – and I don't just mean as a number but as a proper part of the team – so it's good to have a clean slate with a coach. There was a clean slate with Guus [Hiddink] and now there's a clean slate with Verbeek so hopefully I can do the biz. And it gives players in the Hyundai A-League who are doing well the chance to get into the squad.

Do you think it's harder going into matches where you don't know a lot about teams such as Qatar?
I think the more you know about a team the easier it is when you come to play them in a sense of knowing their tendencies and what they are trying to do. And not knowing a lot about the teams we've drawn in our group makes it a little more difficult because you don't know what to expect. But I think we've got the right people in the Australian squad behind the scenes to get us fully prepared for whoever we come up against.

Pim's got a lot of Asian experience too. Do you think that was a big factor in why he was brought in?
Yeah, it's only going to be beneficial for us to have someone who's been through Asia and knows what it's all about.

VITAL STATISTICS
Born: October 23, 1978, Otorohanga, NZ
Height: 174cm
Weight: 70kg
Debut: vs Colombia (L2-3), Bogota, February 2001
Last match: vs Argentina (L0-1), Melbourne, September 2007

HARRY KEWELL

Australia's golden boy is fit again to add his class on the left

Harry Kewell – there's still that frisson of excitement when Qantas Socceroo fans hear that name read out on the team sheet. And Kewell knows all about exciting the Australian fans in the cut and thrust of FIFA World Cup campaigns.

Kewell is still a big-game personality with the mental toughness of a boxer. His poetic poise down the left will once again be crucial if the road to South Africa ends in joy.

This is his fourth FIFA World Cup campaign – and he's still only 29. A grateful Australia will be glad they can pack all Kewell's FIFA World Cup experience and big match qualities into their road case as they navigate the tricky path to South Africa.

The Liverpool man scored for Australia in his last FIFA World Cup appearance. Against the Croatians in a do-or-die group match, he proved why he's so feared by opponents in the pressure matches.

At 2-1 down late in the game, Kewell directed a cross from Mark Bresciano under the body of Croatian keeper Stipe Pletikosa to equalise, thus retrieving Australia's tournament hopes and sending us through to the knock-out stage to play Italy.

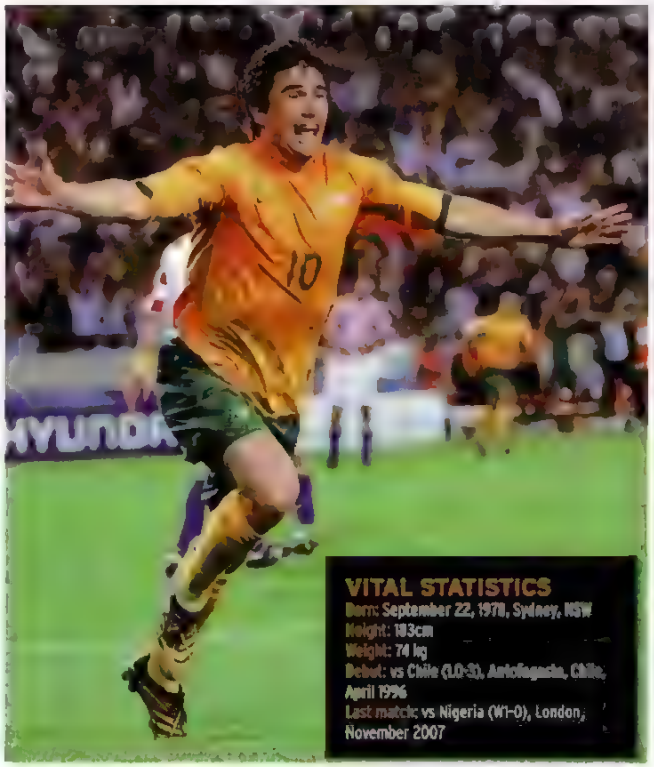
To qualify for the big party in Germany, it was Kewell's contribution against Uruguay in the second leg qualifier that turned the tie in Australia's favour. As a 31st minute substitute, it was the left-sided attacker's neat interplay that enabled Mark Bresciano to get a view of the goal with the ball at his feet. He scored and Australia powered on to win on penalties – Kewell kept his head to score the Qantas Socceroos' first shoot-out goal.

The Smithfield-born flyer also scored on his first appearance in a FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign. That was in Tehran back in 1997 against Iran – and he went on to score again in the second leg at the MCG, although Australia bowed out on the away goals rule.

Since the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Kewell's body has undergone a long, and frustrating rehabilitation from a unfortunate run of groin injuries. However 2008 has delivered Kewell with his most encouraging start in years and he has been playing regularly for Rafael Benitez's Reds, the club he joined five years ago. You can't help but feel the Qantas Socceroos are once again going to benefit.

Kewell, 30 this September, and with nine goals from 29 caps, will once again provide an attacking spark down the left and a creative edge through midfield. But players do modify their game as they get older and Kewell is no different.

"Everyone changes as a player," he tells *FourFourTwo* magazine. "You've got to be unpredictable or defenders can work you out."



VITAL STATISTICS
Born: September 22, 1978, Sydney, NSW
Height: 183cm
Weight: 74 kg
Debut: vs Chile (L0-3), Antofagasta, Chile, April 1996
Last match: vs Nigeria (W1-0), London, November 2007

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JOHN ALOISI

The man who shot us to the 2006 FIFA World Cup is home for a new campaign

John Aloisi is a one-off. He has played in the three big leagues in Spain, Italy and England. He also did not make his full debut in Australian club football until he was 31 – 15 years after he left for the hothouse of European football.

And now, from his new base on the scenic Central Coast in the Hyundai A-League, the goal poacher is poised to again provide a cutting edge for the Qantas Socceroos on the road to South Africa's 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Aloisi's last international game was in July 2007. And yes, he scored. That was against Japan in the quarter-final of the Asian Cup in Vietnam where he snared a late strike in an eventual shoot-out loss.

In fact, over the last three years, his strike rate with the Qantas Socceroos has been phenomenal. That left peg and brilliant head of his has returned 10 goals. Overall, he's second top of the all-time Socceroo goalscoring charts.

At club level, after parting ways with Alaves in Spain's second division after the 2007 AFC Asian Cup, it seemed like an eternity before the South Australian-born striker was paired up with a club. After a number of Hyundai A-League and European clubs were mentioned, it was perhaps fitting for a man many think can walk on water that he signed for the ambitious Mariners.

Aloisi's place in Australian sporting history was confirmed when his left foot connected with a certain penalty on November 16, 2005...Now, Aloisi is not just an Australian football star - he's a sports icon in a country that reveres such heroes.

And his return to Australia after 15 years on the European club scene has been no less successful. Five goals in his first two months back home offer proof that the Adelaide boy still has it.

And it's not just his goals, it's his experience at the pointy end that is helping other young Aussies in Lawrie McKinna's side - such as Alex Wilkinson, John Hutchinson, Matt Simon and Danny Vukovic - develop as they too look to make their mark at national team level.

Aloisi's experience at both club and international level - not to mention his well-honed poacher's instinct - will again be a vital part of Australia's attacking arsenal.

Whatever part John Aloisi - who turned 32 yesterday - plays in this FIFA World Cup campaign, his contribution to the last one in is etched deeply in Australia's rich sporting history and will be remembered forever.

PREVIOUS CLUBS

- Adelaide City
- Standard Liege (Belgium)
- Royal Antwerp (Belgium)
- Cremonese (Italy)
- Portsmouth (England)
- Coventry City (England)
- Osasuna (Spain)
- Deportivo Alaves (Spain)

BIG GAME EXPERIENCE

- FIFA Confederations Cup, Saudi Arabia
- FIFA Confederations Cup, Korea/Japan
- Olympic Games, Athens
- FIFA Confederations Cup, Germany
- FIFA World Cup, Germany
- AFC Asian Cup, Indonesia/Malaysia/Thailand/Vietnam

VITAL STATISTICS

Born: February 5, 1976, Adelaide, SA.
Height: 184cm
Weight: 83kg
Debut: vs Macedonia (W1-0), Skopje, Macedonia, March 1997
Last Match: vs Japan (D1-1), Hanoi, Vietnam, July 2007

VITAL STATISTICS
Born: October 6, 1972, Sydney, NSW
Height: 196cm
Weight: 92kg
Debut: vs Canada (L1-2), Edmonton, July 1993
Last match: vs Nigeria (W1-0), London, November 2007

MARK SCHWARZER

Old big hands is a wise, experienced presence at the back for Australia

If the basis of any successful side is solid defence, then glovesman Mark Schwarzer is a rock Australia can build its campaign for consecutive FIFA World Cup appearances.

An English Premiership regular and Qantas Socceroo first choice, Schwarzer's experience – he has over 50 caps and a decade in the hurley-burly English Premier League – makes him a calming influence, which will be needed in places like Doha and China.

More importantly, with no other Aussie keepers making a strong claim on the shirt, the 35-year-old has stated he's ready to play on for as long as possible – which can only be good news.

Schwarzer has been a regular in the Australian team for the last seven years after debuting in 1993. Schwarzer's name is in the hearts of millions of Aussies after his penalty shoot-out heroics against Uruguay in November, 2005.

The cool-headed John Aloisi may have propelled us to Germany, but it was Schwarzer who set it up with two heroic saves. "Do I mind people making that link? Not at all," he says. "The Uruguay match was obviously an occasion that will always be remembered. Mind you, I hope people who have watched me play throughout my career will remember me for more than just that."

On that special night, the big man ramped up the pressure on the penalty takers as he forced the Uruguayans to make their move first, rather than allowing then them to wait for the keeper to dive. It paid glorious dividends.

Incredibly, this scenario had played out in almost identical circumstances 12 years earlier. Then a rookie 21-year-old, Schwarzer was pressed into action against Canada for a FIFA World Cup qualifier in Sydney after keeper Robert Zabica was red-carded in the first leg.

A long-haired Schwarzer was the hero. He saved two Canadian penalties to help the Qantas Socceroos to a 4-1 shoot-out win to advance to play Argentina for the final spot at USA 94.

But right now, after a disappointing 2007 AFC Asian Cup – "unfortunately, it just didn't go our way in the end" – Schwarzer is highly motivated to help the Qantas Socceroos qualify for the FIFA World Cup through the Asian Confederation for the first time.

The giant hands and commanding presence of the man known as "Schwarzy" will be key to how far this fascinating and difficult journey lasts. Especially if a shoot-out or two pop up along the way.

MARK MILLIGAN

At just 22, Milligan is already a leader and AFC veteran

If Mark Milligan draws breath and reflects on the last three years of his football career, he may just pinch himself and ask, "Did I really do all that?"

Chalk up the achievements: named in the 2006 FIFA World Cup Qantas Socceroos squad; an AFC Asian Cup 2007 campaign; captain of the Olympics-bound Qantas U23s; skipper of the 2005 Qantas Young Socceroos; a Hyundai A-League winner's medal... not bad for a player who was playing state league football in 2005.

Importantly, the Qantas U23s skipper knows exactly what it takes to qualify for a major tournament through the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). Over the last two years, while starring in the Hyundai A-League with Sydney FC, Milligan has crisscrossed Asia playing a lead role in Australia's historic first-ever Olympic qualification through the AFC.

Tricky away ties in far flung destinations such as Beirut, Doha, Hanoi, Damman in Saudi Arabia, and the North Korean capital Pyongyang tested Milligan and his team's mettle to the full. But Milligan is made of stern stuff. From freezing snow to draining humidity, the Qantas U23s beat the conditions and the travel to come out on top.

And it was the talismanic Milligan who popped up to score an equaliser against North Korea away in the final match to ensure a berth in Beijing – his fifth goal in 14 games for the Qantas U23s.

Add the Sydneysider's 2007 AFC Asian Cup jaunt with the Qantas Socceroos in the heat of Thailand and Vietnam, and you could say he's an AFC veteran.

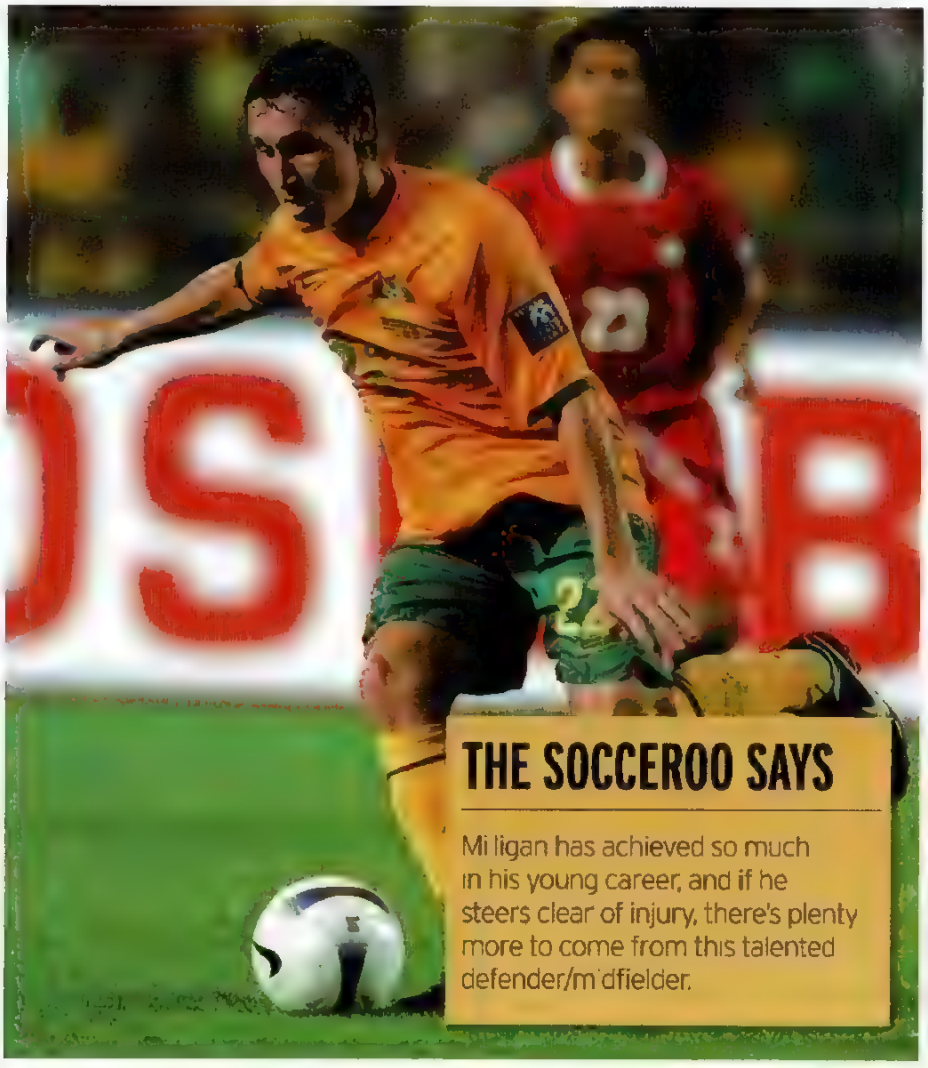
However, Milligan is no overnight success. The defender, who can also play in midfield, made his senior club debut in Australia in 2002 aged just 17. He gained senior experience with various teams – including a brief spell in the NSW premier league – before the Hyundai A-League came along.

Milligan signed with his hometown city Sydney FC for the start of the inaugural 2005/06 season. Around the same time, he captained the Qantas Young Socceroos at the World Youth Championships in the Netherlands – and his football life has been on the up ever since.

The defender has delivered on the promise many saw in him three years ago. Could he become a potential future captain of the national team? Perhaps. But right now you sense this skilful and inspiring 22-year-old Qantas Socceroo will be a valuable asset as we tackle the tough challenges on the road to South Africa 2010.

VITAL STATISTICS

Born: August 4, 1985, Sydney, NSW
Height: 180cm
Weight: 80kg
Debut: vs Liechtenstein (W3-1), Ulm, Germany, June 2006
Last Match: vs Japan (D1-1), Hanoi, Vietnam, July 2007



THE SOCCEROO SAYS

Milligan has achieved so much in his young career, and if he steers clear of injury, there's plenty more to come from this talented defender/midfielder.

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CRAIG MOORE

The Qantas Socceroos' Mr Consistency is one cool customer

Ask his Queensland Roar team-mates and they'll tell you how consistently good Craig Moore is. Consistency and intelligence - Moore's return home has triggered a revival in the state's football fortunes. Could that influence lead to a Qantas Socceroos detour on the road to South Africa?

There had been some speculation that Moore, 32, would not continue in the national team. Luckily, the former Glasgow Rangers man put his hand up and we all breathed a sigh of relief.

From wiry teen learning the ropes with Kevin Muscat's Qantas Socceroos of 1993 to the veteran of 2008 - Moore has always performed for his country - and he's one very proud Aussie.

"We're battlers. We work hard for one another, but we don't want to be known as just battlers. As we've shown in the FIFA World Cup, we can match it with the best in the world," he told *Australian FourFourTwo* magazine recently.

Moore's star shone brightest at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. All the years of experience came to the fore - and none more so than when he had the responsibility of the first half penalty against Croatia in the final group game.

With millions watching in frenzied anticipation in Australia and worldwide, he kept his cool - as you'd expect from this laid back but tough character.

"It was a strange thing, but I had no nerves," he recalls. "I'm normally quite nervous before a game which I feel is a good thing because you know you're going to have a good game if you have nerves. It was adrenaline with that penalty. I knew we needed to get back into the game as soon as possible.

"It was a great opportunity and my thoughts at that time were just to make good contact with the ball. I didn't think anything but I was going to score. I was very, very confident but I've also shown you can miss them," he adds with a laugh in reference to one Hyundai A-League match this season.

Well he is only human.

VITAL STATISTICS
Born: December 12, 1975, Sydney, NSW
Height: 186cm
Weight: 76kg
Debut: vs Ghana (W 1-0), Adelaide, June 1995
Last match: vs Ghana (D 1-1) London, November 2006

AUSTRALIA

GK Ante Covic
GK Danny Vukovic
GK Mark Schwarzer
DF Michael Beauchamp
DF Adam Griffiths
DF Mark Milligan
DF Craig Moore
DF Kevin Muscat
DF Lucas Neill
DF Jade North
DF Michael Thwaite
DF Nikolai Topor-Stanley
DF Rodrigo Vargas
MF Mark Bresciano
MF Jacob Burns
MF Mark Bridge
MF Tim Cahill
MF David Carney
MF Simon Colosimo
MF Nick Carle
MF Jason Culina
MF Travis Dodd
MF Brett Emerton
MF Vince Grella
MF James Holland
MF Brett Holman
MF Harry Kewell
MF Stuart Musialik
MF Tom Pondeljak
MF James Troisi
MF Carl Valeri
MF Luke Wilkshire
FW John Aloisi
FW Alex Brosque
FW Bruce Djite
FW Joel Griffiths
FW Josh Kennedy
FW Scott McDonald
FW Archie Thompson

QATAR

Wissam Rizk MF
Talal Al Bloushi MF
Mesad Al Hamad MF
Fheid Al Shammari MF
Waleed Muhyiddine MF
Majdi Siddiq MF
Fábio César MF
Mohammed Abdulmotaleb MF
Majed Mohammed FW
Khalfan Ibrahim FW
Ali Afif FW
Mohammed Gholam FW
Seyed Bachir FW
Sebastian Quintana FW
Meshal Abdullah FW
Mohammed Saqr GK
Rajab Hamza GK
Abdulaziz Ali GK
Hussain Al Rumaihi GK
Abdullah Koni DF
Ali Sanad DF
Salman Mesbah DF
Abdulrahman Mesbah DF
Saad Al Shammari DF
Mostafa Abdullah DF
Bilal Mohammed DF
Ibrahim Al Ghanim DF
Marconi Amaral Costa DF

Meet the Socceroos

AUSTRALIA

The Qantas Socceroos' first team on the road to South Africa will come from these 39 players picked by Pim Verbeek

MATCH OFFICIALS
Referee Subkhiddin Mohd Salleh (Malaysia)
Assistant Referee 1 Thanom Bonkut (Thailand)
Assistant Referee 2 Mohd Sabri Mat Daud (Malaysia)
4th Official Rosdi Shaharul (Malaysia)
Referees Assessor Maniam Murugiah (Singapore)
Commissioner Ahmed Shahir (Maldives)

STAFFING
Head of Delegation Phillip Wolanski
Team Manager Gary Moretti
Head Coach Pim Verbeek
Assistant Coach Graham Arnold
Goalkeeping Coach Tony Franken
Conditioner Darren Burgess
Doctor Dr Peter Brukner
Physio Phil Coles
Masseur Luke Attwell
Equipment Manager Dominic Rabsch
Media Manager Stuart Hodge
TV Unit Lindsay McNeil
Security Brendan Paterson

GOALKEEPERS

Ante Covic
AGE: 32
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 1

Ante received his first Socceroo call up against Bahrain in February, 2006 with Australia winning 3-1. However, the big keeper had to be content with being third choice at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. But a starring role in the Hyundai A-League has pushed him back into contention after impressing Pim Verbeek this season at the Jets.

Danny Vukovic
AGE: 22
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: CENTRAL COAST MARINERS
APPEARANCES: 0

Danny's form this season with Premiers Plate winners Central Coast has been outstanding. He is brave and commands his line with an authority that belies his years. At international level he played a key role in the Qantas U23s' successful Olympics qualifying campaign and at only 22, Danny could well be part of the next few Qantas Socceroo FIFA World Cup campaigns.

Mark Schwarzer
AGE: 35
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: MIDDLESBROUGH
APPEARANCES: 51

Mark's place in Australian footballing history is set thanks to his FIFA World Cup qualifying heroics against Uruguay. He began his Qantas Socceroo career in similar fashion by starring in a shoot-out during a 1993 FIFA World Cup qualifier in his first senior appearance. A star in the English Premiership with Middlesbrough, Mark is one of our best-loved stars.

DEFENDER

Michael Beauchamp
AGE: 26
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: FC NURNBERG
APPEARANCES: 11

Michael made his national team debut away to Bahrain in February 2006 in an AFC Asian Cup group qualifier. The tall defender had an outstanding game as the Qantas Socceroos won 3-1. He is another former Hyundai A-League player who was given his chance to shine at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup and since then, the German-based Aussie has continued to shine.

DEFENDERS

Adam Griffiths
AGE: 28
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 0

After returning earlier this season to Australia and the Hyundai A-League, Adam's form and versatility for high-flying Newcastle has attracted many admirers. Not only can he play in the centre of defence or as a full-back, but the tall, aggressive Jet has also played in midfield. And he's even popped up to score a few goals for his club.

Mark Milligan
AGE: 22
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC
APPEARANCES: 5

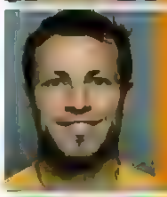
Mark was one of the bolters in Australia's 2006 FIFA World Cup squad. Despite not seeing any game time in Germany, training with the likes of experienced professionals Craig Moore and Lucas Neill did the defender a world of good. He has since led the Qantas U23s to an historic qualification through the Asian Football Confederation to Beijing 2008 and has become a star in the Hyundai A-League with Sydney FC.

Craig Moore
AGE: 32
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: QUEENSLAND ROAR
APPEARANCES: 38

Craig is one of the great leaders in Australian football with over a decade experience in Europe. He showed his class at the 2006 FIFA World Cup with a dominating performance in all four games as well as a penalty goal against Croatia. Under his leadership, Queensland Roar made the Hyundai A-League finals for the first time this season.

Kevin Muscat
AGE: 34
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY
APPEARANCES: 32

Kevin returned to the Socceroo side after a year-long absence to captain his nation to a victory against Kuwait in August, 2006. The tough defender also spearheaded Melbourne Victory in the Hyundai A-League this season, helping them to a late season surge that almost got them into the finals. The Victorian has represented Australia at all levels.



Lucas Neill
AGE: 29
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: WEST HAM UNITED
APPEARANCES: 38

Lucas made his Qantas Socceroos debut more than 10 years ago but it's only over the last four or five years that he has really established himself. After the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, he became one of the most recognised Qantas Socceroos after a commanding performance that impressed many and inspired a new generation of Qantas Socceroo fans.

Jade North
AGE: 26
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 15

A mobile and versatile defender, North fits the bill for the modern Qantas Socceroo perfectly. The Newcastle Jets defender has been recognised at national level, having played for our national U17, U20 and U23 sides as well as the senior side over the last eight years. And the Taree-born North's form this year has been a revelation for Newcastle Jets.

Michael Thwaite
AGE: 24
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: WISLA KRAKOW
APPEARANCES: 6

Queenslander Michael is currently playing in Poland with Wisla Krakow, although he previously had been in the middle of a club transfer wrangle after negotiations stalled when trying to move from his club in Romania. However, the future is bright at national team level for this talented central defender who brings a cultured, calm presence to the defence.

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DEFENDERS | MIDFIELDERS

Nikolai Topor-Stanley

AGE: 22
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: PERTH GLORY
APPEARANCES: 0

Another of Graham Arnold's star Qantas U23s who have come of age over the last two seasons as the side qualified through the AFC for the first time. A powerful tall defender Nikolai made his name in the Hyundai A-League with Sydney FC before transferring to Perth Glory this season. With a dearth of naturally left-sided players, Nikolai is worth his weight in gold.

Rodrigo Vargas

AGE: 29
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY
APPEARANCES: 0

It's been an incredible two years for Rodrigo Vargas. The classy defender only made his debut for Hyundai A-League side Melbourne Victory in 2006 after starring in Victoria's premier league. And now the 29-year-old has capped a remarkable rise through Australian football ranks by being included in Pim Verbeek's 30-man Qantas Socceroo squad.

Mark Bresciano

AGE: 27
POSITION: ATTACKING MIDFIELDER
CLUB: PALERMO
APPEARANCES: 38

After representing the Qantas Young Socceroos in 1999 and the Qantas U23s at the Sydney Olympics, Mark has etched out an excellent career in the highly technical Italian Serie A. Clubs such as Empoli, Parma and now Palermo have benefited from his intelligent attacking runs and precision free kicks. One of Australia's stars of the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany.

Jacob Burns

AGE: 29
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: WISŁA KRAKOW
APPEARANCES: 5

Hard working Jacob debuted for the Qantas Socceroos in Scotland when the Aussies shocked the Scots 2-0 in a friendly eight years ago. His recent move to Polish side Wisła Krakow seems to have resurrected his career after initial early success with Leeds United. Last played for the Qantas Socceroos against Nigeria in November last year.

Mark Bridge

AGE: 22
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 0

Mark's goal-scoring contribution to Newcastle Jets' Hyundai A-League campaign has been vital in taking the scoring load off goal-machine Joel Griffiths. And at international level, Mark was an important contributor to the Qantas U23s' successful campaign for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. At 22, Mark is part of the new generation of Aussie football stars.

Tim Cahill

AGE: 28
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: EVERTON
APPEARANCES: 27

Tim will be forever etched in Australian football folklore as the first Aussie player to score at a FIFA World Cup when he slammed home the equaliser against Japan at Germany 2006. In the English Premiership he's arguably the best attacking midfielder in the division and is a Qantas Socceroo talisman as we look ahead to South Africa 2010.

David Carney

AGE: 24
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: SHEFFIELD UNITED
APPEARANCES: 6

David is an excitement machine. He caught the eye with some outstanding performances at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup finals, playing in the unfamiliar role of left wing-back. It earned him a contract with ambitious Sheffield United after he'd made his name at Sydney FC. Carney scored a brilliant goal in his last game for the national team against Nigeria last November.

MIDFIELDERS

Simon Colosimo

AGE: 29
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC
APPEARANCES: 24

Simon made his debut against Fiji in 1998 and also represented the Qantas U23s at the Sydney Olympics eight years ago. He has been a leader for Perth Glory over the last three seasons having made over 50 appearances for the Hyundai A-League franchise before signing with Sydney FC last month on a two-year deal

Nick Carle

AGE: 26
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: BRISTOL CITY
APPEARANCES: 7

Nick is known for his flair and creativity and he can unlock defences with his trickery and vision. He featured in Australia's 2007 AFC Asian Cup campaign, scoring in the penalty shoot-out against Japan and has since played in Turkey and now with Bristol City in England. Nick won the Hyundai A-League's Johnny Warren Medal as the player of the year for 2006/07

Jason Culina

AGE: 27
[redacted]
CLUB: PSV EINDHOVEN
APPEARANCES: 27

The son of former Sydney FC manager Branko Culina, Jason's mobility, link play and ability to play the ball out of midfield intelligently will be vital on the journey to South Africa for the Qantas Socceroos. Jason has spent the last eight years playing his club football in Holland and is now considered one of the national team's most important players.

Travis Dodd

AGE: 28
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: ADELAIDE UNITED
APPEARANCES: 2

Travis made a stunning debut for the Qantas Socceroos in 2006. It was his slide rule goal that unlocked Kuwait's defence in an AFC Asian Cup qualifier at the Sydney Football Stadium. Travis has continued his fine form in the Hyundai A-League since then, becoming one of the most consistent attacking right midfielders with the Reds of Adelaide.

Brett Emerton

AGE: 28
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: BLACKBURN ROVERS
APPEARANCES: 63

Brett has been a regular Qantas Socceroo since the late '90s when he debuted aged just 18. After captaining Australia at the 2000 Sydney Olympics he moved to Feyenoord then later completed a dream move to the English Premier League and Blackburn Rovers. Brett is one of the best athletes ever to pull on the Green and Gold

Vince Grella

AGE: 28
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: TORINO
APPEARANCES: 32

A hard-working midfielder who closes down opposing players and mops up stray passes, Grella is a vital cog in the Qantas Socceroo engine room. He blossomed with Empoli in Serie A and upon their relegation in 2004 was signed by Parma where he was reunited with his good mate and fellow Qantas Socceroo Marco Bresciano. He currently plays with Torino.

James Holland

AGE: 18
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 0

James's rise to Qantas Socceroo selection has been nothing short of meteoric. At just 18, James only broke into the Hyundai A-League with Newcastle Jets a couple of months ago. However, the attacking midfielder's running, precision passing, deft free kicks and ability to score caught the eye of Pim Verbeek who immediately included him in his first squad

MIDFIELDERS

Brett Holman

AGE: 23
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: NEC NIJMEGEN
APPEARANCES: 11

Brett burst onto the scene as a 17-year-old and was soon snapped up by Dutch giant Feyenoord. He was then loaned out to Excelsior, although the club was later relegated from the Dutch top flight. Brett moved to NEC Nijmegen at the end of the 2006 season - he also debuted for the Qantas Socceroos that year against Bahrain

Harry Kewell

AGE: 29
POSITION: MIDFIELD
CLUB: LIVERPOOL
APPEARANCES: 29

Recently voted one of the top five Australian footballers of all time by *FourFourTwo* magazine, Kewell is an Aussie sports superstar. His performances at the 2006 FIFA World Cup were memorable as was his debut over a decade ago in a FIFA World Cup qualifier against Iran. Despite suffering a series of injuries over the last two years, he's still a huge danger to any team.

Stuart Musialik

AGE: 22
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 0

A classy holding midfielder with a good range of passing, Stuart was key in the Qantas U23s' qualification campaign for Beijing. At club level, Newcastle-born Stuart has proved invaluable to the Jets. So highly thought of was Stuart that he was invited to join the Qantas Socceroos during the 2006 FIFA World Cup as a train-on player.

Tom Pondeljak

AGE: 32
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: CENTRAL COAST MARINERS
APPEARANCES: 4

On the back of a stellar season with Hyundai A League Premiers Plate winners, the Central Coast Mariners, Tom's energetic, skilful midfield performances have caught the eye. And it's not the first time the attacking midfielder has been named in a Qantas Socceroo squad - the Melbourne-born tyro played four times for the national team in 2002.

James Troisi

AGE: 19
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE UNITED
APPEARANCES: 0

James is poised to break into the big time with English Premiership side Newcastle United. The Adelaide-born youngster is currently in their reserves team but is also a key player for Graham Arnold's Qantas U23s. The talented attacking midfielder plays a lot like Harry Kewell - he can take players on, get in a good cross and can score

Carl Valeri

AGE: 23
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: INTER MILAN
APPEARANCES: 4

The defensive midfielder has represented Australia at all levels and made his debut for the Qantas Socceroos in March, 2007 against China. Carl has played all his professional football in Italy, after he was signed by Inter Milan, who have loaned him out to smaller clubs to gain experience. He is expected to be a regular Qantas Socceroo in years to come

Luke Wilkshire

AGE: 26
POSITION: MIDFIELD
CLUB: FC TWENTE
APPEARANCES: 20

Playing for the Qantas U23s at the Athens Olympics put Wilkshire in the mix for the Qantas Socceroos. He moved from Middlesbrough to Bristol City in 2003 where regular first team football improved his game, as shown by his impressive displays at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. This tenacious and hard working midfielder now plays for Dutch side FC Twente

John Aloisi

AGE: 32
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: CENTRAL COAST MARINERS
APPEARANCES: 54

Birthday boy John – he turned 32 yesterday – is a national hero after hitting the winning penalty shot that saw Australia reach the 2006 FIFA World Cup, where he scored against Japan. That followed his three goals at the 2004 Olympics and four goals at the 2005 FIFA Confederations Cup. John's return to the Hyundai A-League and the Mariners was a massive coup.

Alex Brosque

AGE: 24
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC
APPEARANCES: 4

Alex has enjoyed an excellent season with Sydney FC, scoring eight times with an overall tally of 20 goals in three seasons in the Hyundai A-League. A former AIS student, left-footer Brosque tasted European football with Westerlo in Belgium before a return home cemented his reputation as an intelligent and potent striker.

Bruce Djite

AGE: 21
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: ADELAIDE UNITED
APPEARANCES 0

Bruce is one of the hottest players in the Hyundai A-League. The Adelaide United striker has also been pivotal for our Qantas U23s during qualification and as they look ahead to the 2008 Olympics. Bruce can hold the ball up and be an effective target man. Expect him to be knocking on the door of Qantas Socceroo selection in the future.

Joel Griffiths

AGE: 28
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 1

This has been Joel's season with a stunning return to form for the Newcastle Jets. Thirteen goals so far gives him the record as the highest individual goalscorer ever in one season of the Hyundai A-League. And it's this form that has helped the Jets into a top two spot. Joel scored on debut for the Qantas Socceroos in 2005 against Jamaica.

Josh Kennedy

AGE: 25
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: KARLSRUHE
APPEARANCES: 4

Who could forget big Josh's contribution to the Qantas Socceroos' 2006 FIFA World Cup campaign? After coming on late in the opener against Japan, it was the 192cm striker's presence that unsettled the Japanese defence. He continues to be a dangerous impact player for the Qantas Socceroos. Wodonga-born Josh recently signed with Karlsruhe.

Scott McDonald

AGE: 24
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: CELTIC
APPEARANCES: 4

Consistent performances for Motherwell in the Scottish Premier League earned Scott a full international call up for the Qantas Socceroos against Bahrain in 2006. Since then, Melbourne-born Scott has become the hottest Aussie striker in Europe scoring a bagful of goals for Scottish giant Celtic in the league and in the UEFA Champions League.

Archie Thompson

AGE: 29
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY
APPEARANCES: 28

Livewire striker Archie holds the world record for the most goals in an international match, scoring 13 times for the Qantas Socceroos against American Samoa in 2001. After a successful stint in Belgium, Archie returned home and has been a consistent and effective scorer in the Hyundai A-League with his hometown club Melbourne Victory.

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ONE TO WATCH

STUART MUSIALIK
MIDFIELD DIAMOND

The central rock of the Newcastle Jets is shaping as the Qantas Socceroos' future midfield general

The similarities are there: the quiet confidence, the air of authority and unflinching commitment to the team. Stuart Musialik, 22, may not yet be a regular in the Qantas Socceroos, but when the indomitable Vinnie Grella passes on the baton of defensive midfield screener in the national team, many feel the young Novocastrian will be ready to step into the Victorian's big shoes.

At the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Grella will be 30 going on 31 – Musialik will be 25. So time is on the Jets man's side. In the meantime, Musialik has a 2008 Olympics to look forward to – ideal preparation for the Newcastle-born midfielder's national team aspirations.

Musialik shares a number of similarities with the Serie A star. He's no skyscraper, but he's a scrapper in that holding role in front of defence. "I like to play the defensive midfielder. I feel most comfortable in that role," Musialik says.

He's not a prolific scorer either – one goal for each season of the Hyundai A-League at time of writing – but when he does score, it is often special. Who could forget Musialik's stunning goal for the Jets in the Hyundai A-League round five clash against Victory? His barnstorming run from midfield wasn't checked and Musialik let fire with a outside-of-the-boot curler that zoomed past Michael Theoklitos.

"When you know you're going to be in the side week-in, week-out, it gives you more confidence. And when you do play, it helps you prepare for the games mentally," he says.

The Beijing Olympics later this year is the culmination of a two-year campaign for Musialik and the Qantas U23s. Qualifying through the Asian Football Confederation has been an invaluable lesson in Asian football. And the Qantas Socceroos will no doubt tap into those insights for their own FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign.

Musialik debuted for Graham Arnold's Qantas U23s in 2006 in the Peace Cup in Vietnam. Injury may have restricted his appearances to eight, but as Australia looks ahead to Beijing, Musialik is an integral part of the midfield diamond.

Prior to the Olympics campaign, the Newcastle-born defensive midfielder played all three games in Australia's FIFA U20 World Cup in 2005, although the Qantas Young Socceroos exited at the group stage. Being part of the Socceroos squad last May and August has only added to Musialik's confidence.

Unobtrusive and highly effective, Musialik was born to play the screener role. His workrate is excellent, he tackles well and creates a basis for Joel Griffiths, Denni and Mark Bridge to weave their magic for the Hunter franchise.

With the Olympics and a number of matches and training camps, Musialik's game is set to reach yet another level in 2008 – and that's good news for the future of the Qantas Socceroos beyond the campaign for South Africa 2010.

VITAL STATISTICS

Born: March 29, 1985, Newcastle, NSW
Height: 175cm
Weight: 71kg
Qantas U23 debut: vs Iran (D 0-0), Peace Cup, Hanoi, Vietnam, April 2006
Last match: vs Lebanon (W 3-0), Olympic Games qualifier, Gosford, NSW, September 2007

PIM VERBEEK TACTICAL APPROACH

[illegible] says [illegible] tricky [illegible], the [illegible] to ready [illegible] Qatar side tonight

by Aidan Ormond

Qantas Socceroos coach Pim Verbeek describes the lead up to tonight's first FIFA World Cup qualifier as one of the most difficult assignments of his coaching career.

But the former South Korean coach also says he's upbeat about tonight as Australia begin the journey to South Africa with a difficult tie against Qatar at Telstra Dome. The Dutch-born straight-shooter gives us his views on the eve of the big match...

PIM, HAVE THE LAST TWO MONTHS BEEN HARDER OR EASIER THAN YOU ANTICIPATED?

I think it was more difficult than I expected. Okay, you always know it's a challenge and we knew what kind of problems there would be but over the January period it was more difficult than expected. But we don't think about problems, we think about solutions. And so far I think we have found all the best possible solutions.

LAST WEEK'S TRAINING CAMP IN MELBOURNE - WHAT SORT OF THINGS DID YOU WORK ON?

Because Hyundai A-League teams play different systems, I spent all my time on team tactics, the strategy to beat Qatar and the way I think we have to play. It was only team tactics so every player knows exactly what to do. In Europe, the general system is always the same, but here teams can play with various systems. Every system needs different qualities from players.

HOW DIFFICULT WAS IT TO CHOOSE THIS SQUAD, PARTICULARLY THE HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE PLAYERS?

Choosing the players was difficult because the level of Hyundai A-League players was at the same level - not too many standout from the others. And that includes the keepers - it was very close. Ante Covic made a good impression and Danny Vukovic has been doing very well in the Hyundai A-League. I must say it was very difficult. And we all know there aren't that many left-footed full-backs here so that was difficult too after Dean Heffernan got injured.

WERE YOU HAPPY WITH THE TRAINING CAMPS LAST MONTH IN SYDNEY?

Before you think there are only eight teams in the Hyundai A-League so you can see a lot of players, so that enables you to get a good impression. But in the end it would have been easier at least to have a normal training camp to understand the players better and for them to learn how we want them to play.

FOR THE AUSSIE-BASED PLAYERS, UNDERSTANDING YOUR TACTICAL IDEAS IN SUCH A SHORT TIME MUST HAVE BEEN A BIG CHALLENGE?

Here, teams generally play different systems - so players coming to me have to adapt to what I like. And it's impossible to do anything if you only have them for one day in the week instead of a club coach who has the whole week with them. But of course I knew about this problem, so I have to do more intense work during the training camps.

WHAT IMPORTANCE DO YOU PLACE ON PLAYERS BEING VERSATILE?

There are a few players who can play midfield and defence, and you always need players like that. But in principle, I selected the players for one special position. Because to play in different positions you must be very good and

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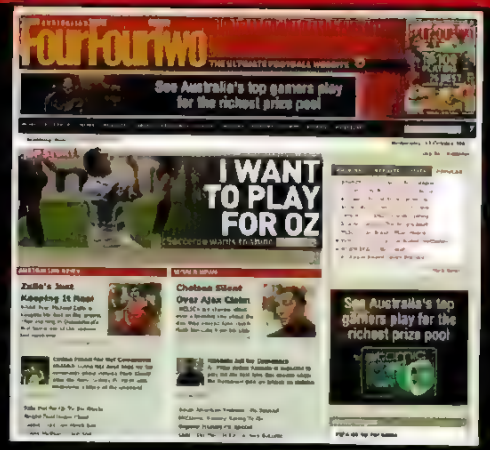

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DID YOU KNOW?

- Pim Verbeek has coached across Asia. Not only did he manage South Korea at the last AFC Asian Cup but he has also been assistant coach at the United Arab Emirates Al Ain club level, he has guided Japanese J League teams Kyoto Purple Sanga and Omiya Ardija.
- Pim was born in Rotterdam in 1956 and went on to coach Feyenoord Rotterdam in the early '90s.
- The Dutchman was assistant to former Qantas Socceroos' coach Guus Hiddink at the 2002 World Cup when the pair guided South Korea to the semi-finals.

"THIS IS THE MOST DIFFICULT JOB... WE ONLY HAVE FIVE WEEKS TO PREPARE, BUT I KNEW THAT"

It's hard enough already to adapt to a new system for the players in such a short time

HAVING ROB BAAN AND GRAHAM ARNOLD, WHO KNOW DUTCH COACHING AND LOCAL PLAYERS, MUST'VE BEEN HANDY?
Yes, when I first took over, they gave me a list of players who were potentials in the squad. I made my own list after that and we discussed individual players because they knew the players better in terms of what they can handle, the pressure they can handle. So I was very pleased with all the information I got because I don't have the time to work for six months to prepare the side – I only have five weeks. And so far we have had an open and to-the-point discussion and I've been able to ask the questions I've wanted to ask.

YOU'VE BEEN BUSY IN AUSTRALIA, BUT YOUR RIGHT HAND MAN HENK DUUT HAS ALSO BEEN WORKING HARD IN EUROPE AND IN ASIA ...
Yes he has. I was given many DVDs about the players and of course I know the players as I've seen them in Europe before, but it's still not the same as seeing them on the pitch. Henk knows exactly what we need to have results. So he's seen the players – particularly those we wanted to know a little bit more about. But for me, the most important job is that he knows a lot about the opponents.

HOW DOES THIS JOB COMPARE TO YOUR TIME AS COACH OF SOUTH KOREA'S NATIONAL TEAM?
That was a big challenge and it was also easier for me as I knew the players quite well. But by far this is the most difficult job. In Korea we had 18 months to work with the team [ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2002]. So we let the players make mistakes and learn. But now we only have five weeks. I knew that when I signed, but I'm really looking forward to the Telstra Dome and the first game.

HOW DO AUSTRALIAN PLAYERS DIFFER TO THOSE YOU'VE COACHED IN, SAY, SOUTH KOREA?
The Korean players are physically strong and very fit. When you play against them, they will chase you all day. Here, because of the climate also, the speed of the game is not as high as in Korea. That is the biggest difference.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF QATAR?
Individually they are strong. Physically strong and Qatar has some players with special qualities. And they can play attacking and counter-attacking football.

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"I FELT ALREADY AT HOME THE FIRST TIME I CAME HERE... IN AUSTRALIA THEY ARE MORE RELAXED"

HAVE YOU SEEN QATAR PLAY?
I saw Qatar at the 2006 Asian Games in Doha [Qatar] and they won it. And I saw Qatar six weeks later in the Emirates at the Gulf Cup. There, I thought they were unlucky. So luck is also part of football. And in the AFC Asian Cup I saw them... everyone knows how difficult it was to play [at the AFC Asian Cup] for every country, because of the training facilities, climate, and travelling. Even big teams struggled. But they [Qatar] have had a good preparation and a new coach. So it can be a completely different team.

MANY FANS WILL RECALL QATAR COACH JORGE FOSSATI FROM THE 2005 URUGUAY QUALIFIERS...
Of course he knows a lot about Australian football. But in the end, you have to prepare your team but yes, the fact that he knows Australian players is an advantage, definitely, for them. But the players have to do their job.

DID NAMING A LARGE QANTAS SOCCEROOS SQUAD LAST MONTH ALSO KEEP QATAR GUESSING?
Exactly. I didn't think about this when we decided to name a large squad though. Okay, countries like Qatar have more possibilities to prepare themselves, but I'm sure it's a big advantage, there's no doubt about it [to name a large squad].

WHAT EFFECT WILL THE LARGE LOCAL CROWD HAVE TONIGHT?
Every player is different - some love the big crowds. It's one of the things I don't know about Hyundai A-League players and I think that's what makes my job interesting. Over 50,000 fans are very important. But also Qatar are not used to playing in front of such a crowd because in their country, they don't get big crowds. That gives us an advantage.

CAN WE CALL YOU "AUSSIE" PIM?
When I first arrived, I wore a suit but found I was the only one in the stadium in a suit. That was how it was in Korea but here they are more relaxed. I'm also like that. And life here is not so stressful as Seoul with so many traffic jams and so many people. It was fantastic over there but this is much closer to what I'm used to in Europe and the European mentality. I felt already at home the first time I came here.

VITAL STATISTICS
Born: March 12, 1956, Rotterdam, Netherlands
Clubs managed: Sparta Rotterdam, De Graafschap, Feyenoord, FC Groningen, Fortuna Sittard, Omiya Ardija, Kyoto Sanga
Nations managed: Netherlands Antilles, South Korea, Australia
Last match: Korea vs Japan (W0-0, pen 6-5), AFC Asian Cup third place play-off, July 2007

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SHOOT 'N' SCORE!

1 Who scored for the Qantas Socceroos in their 1-0 win over Uruguay in a FIFA World Cup qualifier at the MCG in 2001?

2 Archie Thompson scored five goals in the 2007 Hyundai A-League Grand Final. Who scored the sixth goal?

3 What was the attendance that day at the Telstra Dome?

4 What was the result when the Qantas Socceroos last played in Melbourne?

5 And who scored that day?

6 Name Melbourne Victory's first-ever opponent in the inaugural Hyundai A-League season in 2005?

7 True or false: Melbourne Victory football operations manager Gary Cole is a former Qantas Socceroo?

8 How many Hyundai A-League games did it take Melbourne Victory to score 100 goals?

9 How many goals did Archie Thompson score for the Qantas Socceroos against American Samoa in Coffs Harbour in 2001?

10 What is Melbourne Victory's record for most wins in a row?

11 Who is this former Qantas Socceroo?

13 How old is Melbourne Victory defender Rodrigo Vargas?

14 True or False: Kevin Muscat once played for Wolverhampton?

15 Which Hyundai A-League club did Victory's Adrian Caceres play for before he signed for Melbourne?

16 Who won the 2007 AFC Asian Cup?

17 Who won the 2006 Asian Games football gold medal?

18 For which team did Melbourne Victory's Matthew Kemp play for in the 2007 AFC Champions League?

19 True or False: His side topped its group?

20 In which country was Melbourne Victory's Adrian Caceres born?

21 At which FIFA World Cup did Melbourne Victory's Carlos Hernandez play for Costa Rica?

22 True or false: Victory's Joe Keenan was born in London?

23 Name the Victory player who was a youth player at Manchester United between 1994 and 1998?

24 Where was Australia's 1974 FIFA World Cup keeper Jack Reilly born?

25 Who did Australia draw against in the 1974 FIFA World Cup?

26 Who scored first for the Qantas Socceroos in the penalty shoot-out vs Uruguay in Sydney in November, 2005?

27 How many goals did John Aloisi score at the 2006 FIFA World Cup?

28 Who did Aloisi score against at the 2006 FIFA World Cup?

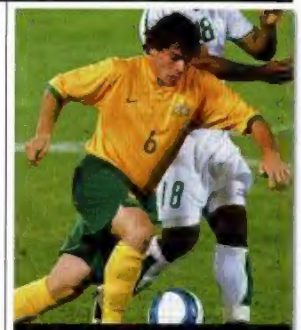
29 Who did Aloisi replace vs Italy at the 2006 FIFA World Cup?

30 Who scored the penalty that knocked the Qantas Socceroos out of the 2006 FIFA World Cup?

ANSWERS!

1: Kevin Muscat 2: Kristian Sarkies 3: 55,436 4: Argentina won 1-0 5: Martin Demichelis 6: Sydney FC 7: True 8: 65 9: 13 10: 8 11: Alex Tobin 12: Danny Tiatto 13: 29 14: True 15: Perth Glory 16: Iraq 17: Qatar 18: Adelaide United 19: False 20: Argentina 21: Germany 2006 22: False He was born in Southampton, England 23: Grant Brebner 24: Scotland 25: Chile 26: Harry Kewell 27: One 28: Japan 29: Mike Sterjovski 30: Francesco Totti

LEIGH BROXHAM MINI-MUSKY



VITAL STATISTICS

Born: January 13, 1988, Melbourne, VIC
Height: 169cm
Weight: 70kg
Qantas U23 debut: vs Chinese Taipei (W11-0), AFC qualifier, Adelaide, Feb 2007
Last match: vs North Korea (1-1), AFC qualifier, Pyongyang, November 2007

Kevin Muscat's protege targets new goals

Could 2007 have been any better for Leigh Broxham? He broke into the Melbourne side at the tail end of a smashing season as the marauding Victorians swept all before them on their way to the Hyundai A-League title. This led to a call-up for youngster to the Qantas U23s – and he's been a regular in both sides ever since.

The former VIS student – who turned 20 last month – debuted for the Qantas U23s against Chinese Taipei in an 11-0 thrashing last February. And 10 months and much crisscrossing of Asia later, Broxham was on his way to the 2008 Olympics after Graham Arnold's talented team overcame two tough qualifying groups to go through to Beijing. This included playing in freezing North Korea five days after beating Iraq on the sunny NSW Central Coast.

"I don't think too many people get to go to places like Pyongyang," Broxham tells *The Socceroo* of the side's final qualifier last November. "It's something you always remember and of course the home game in Gosford against Iraq was special too because of the great crowd and the win.

"Pyongyang was difficult. The pitch and the travel was hard – but we accepted it and got on with the job."

Broxham has also been getting on with the job of securing a regular berth at Telstra Dome. He's played 17 times for Victory this season and has started an impressive 16 of those matches.

For a player who's big on goal-setting, it must have been difficult to set new goals at the start of this year. Or was it?

"You sort of look to better your goals and that's what I did – I want to keep improving," says Broxham. "Goal-setting is important. There are some longer term things you want to do and some shorter term goals too.

"I just want to keep getting myself into the side and hopefully play in the AFC Champions League with Victory this year.

"You try to not enjoy it too much because you want to set the next goal"

"You want to achieve something but you try to not enjoy it too much because you want to set the next goal," he adds.

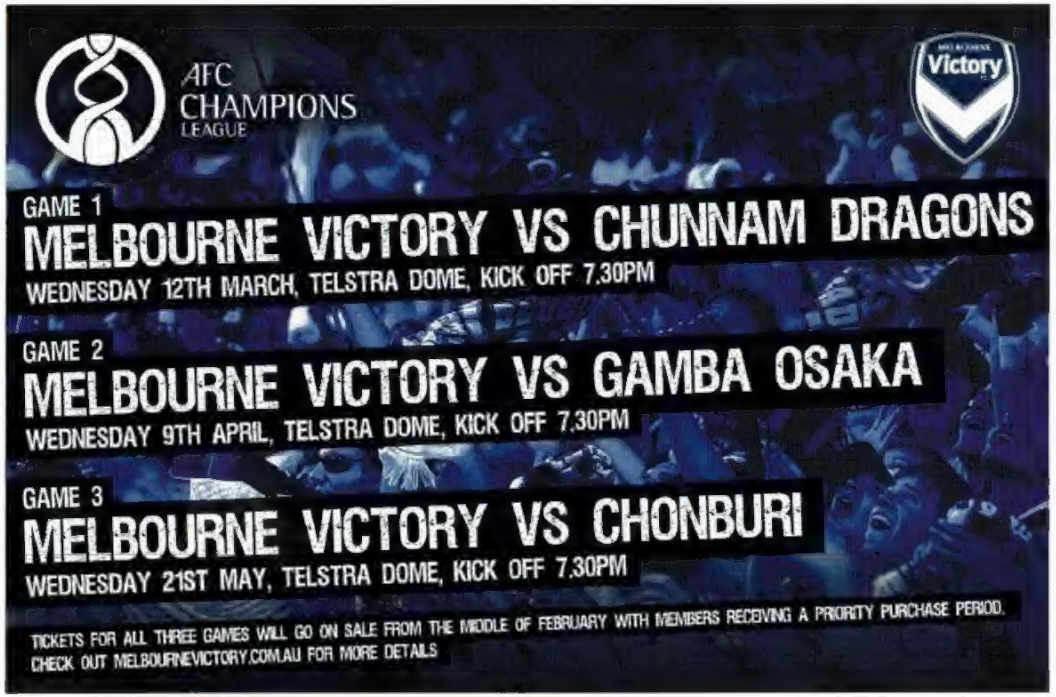
For a guy whose football hero is Roy Keane, and who has been taken under the wing of Kevin Muscat at Victory, you'd expect one very tough hombre. And he is. The squat midfielder is small in stature and solid as a rock.

Like his heroes, he works very hard, distributes well and bites in tackles. He's also a model professional.

"I've learnt a lot over the last year – especially off Kevin Muscat. He's always keeping me on my toes."

Muscat has gone out of his way in training to make sure Broxham is toughened up. It's because he likes him – Muscat probably sees a little of himself in the youngster.

"I got a text after a match recently," recalls Broxham. "They mentioned I'd been nicknamed 'Mini-Musky'. It's a compliment. I've got great respect for Muscat."



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MARIA KIOTTOS
JET-SET AUSTRALIA FAN

Her devotion to the Qantas Socceroos means Maria's forever flying off to see her beloved Green and Gold heroes

NAME: Maria Kiottos
AGE: 22
OCCUPATION: Travel consultant
FAVOURITE HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE TEAM: Newcastle Jets

WHAT WAS THE FIRST QANTAS SOCCEROO MATCH YOU WENT TO?
Match one in the friendly series against Brazil in 1999 in Sydney.

DESCRIBE YOUR PASSION FOR THE BOYS IN GREEN AND GOLD...
I have always said that there are two reasons why I love football; one is the club team I supported when I was younger and the other is the Qantas Socceroos. I will always love the game but nothing beats supporting your country, home and away. It is the sport itself, the people and the culture that make me so passionate about our game and no other.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE MEMORY SUPPORTING THE ROOS?
The qualifier in 2005 and Germany were the most amazing of course... but the funniest would have to be watching the AFC Asian Cup in Bangkok in absolute torrential rain and also riding on the back of a motorbike through the streets of Hanoi to the Japan match with Qantas Socceroo flags waving behind us – definitely memorable!

GERMANY 2006...
Germany was the biggest party in the world; it was what I always imagined football culture to be about. Watching the Qantas Socceroos in the FIFA World Cup was a dream and was even more special because I only found out that I had tickets a week before. I don't know if another tournament will be able to match that atmosphere and those emotions, but I will be more than willing to go along to find out!

AFC ASIAN CUP 2007? HOW WAS IT?
It was different. After the massive support in Germany it was scaled down, but the passion was still there. The results and the mood made it harder as the tournament went along to stay positive, but everyone still did and many went to Vietnam. I think it was a good introduction into Asian football, and from what I witnessed after the Socceroos were knocked out, this region has a lot to offer. The AFC Asian Cup was a learning experience. It was great to see the way other cultures supported their national team. Vietnam was unexpected and crazy. We made a mad dash for Vietnam only to find tickets being sold on foldout tables on the streets outside the stadiums!

FAVOURITE QANTAS SOCCEROO?
I could never really answer this one... but if I have to I'll say Mark Bresciano and Brett Emerton.

ARE YOU GOING TO CHINA FOR THE QUALIFIER NEXT MONTH?
Kunming is a definite possibility. I think it will be vital to have a decent Australian crowd at the first away Asian qualifier ever. I will be proud to be part of it if I get there. There is nothing like being on a football tour!

HOW HARD WILL IT BE FOR THE TEAM TO QUALIFY FOR 2010?
The AFC Asian Cup proved that it won't be simple and easy. The football played in the semi finals and the final was exceptional and I am glad that the AFC Asian Cup happened. Hopefully we will learn from it. We have the squad to qualify but it isn't going to be easy. I just hope we've learned from the past in the AFC Asian Cup.

ANY FUTURE PLANS?
It looks like I will be heading overseas indefinitely in the next couple of months. It is still unclear whether I'm going to North America or Europe, but if it is Europe I would love nothing more than getting to some games involving Australian players playing for their clubs.

NUMBER CRUNCH

All the numbers you need to know about Australia's opponent

563

THE NUMBER OF KILOMETRES OF COASTLINE IN QATAR

907,000

THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN QATAR

ALTHOUGH ONLY ABOUT 200,000 ARE ACTUALLY QATARI – THE REST ARE FOREIGNERS WORKING IN THE COUNTRY

3

THE NUMBER OF GOALS STAR QATAR STRIKER SEBASTIAN QUINTANA SCORED AT THE LAST AFC ASIAN CUP

1998

THE FIFA WORLD CUP QATAR CAME CLOSEST TO QUALIFYING FOR (SAUDI ARABIA JUST PIPPED 'EM)

7

THE NUMBER OF TIMES QATAR HAS QUALIFIED FOR THE AFC ASIAN CUP

2000

THE YEAR QATAR REACHED THE QUARTER-FINALS OF THE AFC ASIAN CUP

CURRENT FIFA RANKING **88**

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AUSTRALIA

Good luck on the first step to South Africa.

Qantas Socceroos v Qatar. February 6. Melbourne.

That's the Spirit.
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